DOCUMENT RESUME

ED 129 456 PS 008 880

AUTHOR	Garcia, Angela B.; And Others
TITLE	Communicating and Working with Parents.
INSTITUTION	Far West Lab. for Educational Research and Development, San Francisco, Calif.
SPONS AGENCY	National Inst. of Education (DHEW), Washington, D.C.
PUB DATE	75
NOTE	178p.; For related documents, see PS 008 875-891
AVAILABLE FROM	Far West Laboratory for Educational Research and Development, 1855 Folsom Street, San Francisco, California 94103 ($6.95)
EDRS PRICE	MF-$0.83 HC-$10.03 Plus Postage.
DESCRIPTORS	*Communication Skills; *Early Childhood Education; *Elementary Education; Interaction Process Analysis; Nonverbal Communication; Parent Role; Parent School Relationship; Parent Teacher Conferences; *Parent Teacher Cooperation; Performance Based Education; *Performance Based Teacher Education; Preschool Education; Problem Solving; Surveys; Teacher Education; *Teacher Education Curriculum
IDENTIFIERS	Far West Laboratory for Educational R and D; *Flexible Learning System

ABSTRACT

This unit of the Flexible Learning System (FLS) is designed to give teachers and other adults insight into and practice with oral and written communication with parents. The ten sessions in this unit have been designed as workshops. Each session has a central theme, and builds upon the preceding sessions. Themes include perception and feedback in communication, communication and awareness, parent roles in the program, facilitating techniques, problem solving, and parent surveys. Each session begins with sharing and reviewing individual experiences in previous activities. Opportunities are provided to explore the way themes relate to the users' personal interests. Learning activities provide an opportunity to practice several communication skills, such as responding to an emotional or critical outburst from someone else, encouraging greater parent participation in the classroom, responding when one feels misinterpreted, recognizing nonverbal messages, and setting reasonable goals. Related FLS units include: "Problem Solving with Children"; "Analyzing Children's Books from a Chicano Perspective"; "Selecting Children's Books with a Black Perspective"; "Using Toys and Games with Children"; "Helping Children Develop Healthy Self-Concepts." (Author/SB)

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LEARNER'S GUIDE

communicating and working with parents

2

THE FLEXIBLE LEARNING SYSTEM—COMPETENCY-BASED LEARNING UNITS FOR ADULTS IN EARLY CHILDHOOD EDUCATION

Communicating and Working With Parents

by

Angela B. Garcia

Margaret S. Robinson

Dennis C. Sims, Ph.D.

Masako N. Tanaka, Director
Flexible Learning System

Far West Laboratory for Educational Research and Development
San Francisco

This learning unit is a product of the Early Childhood Education Program of the Far West Laboratory, San Francisco, a public, nonprofit organization supported in part by funds from the National Institute of Education, Department of Health Education and Welfare. The opinions expressed in this publication do not necessarily reflect the position or policy of the National Institute of Education, and no official endorsement should be inferred.

Far West Laboratory for Educational Research and Development.

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ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

Staff of the Early Childhood Education Program
(during development of this unit)

Abrams, Allan
Alward, Keith
Biestman, Margot*
Body, Bart
Brown, Judy
Chow, Stanley
Culang, Cecilia*
DeAnda, Nat
De La Torre, Rosemary
Diaz de Leon, Josefina
Hay, Johnnie
Hubner, Judy
Johnston, Janet*
Lewis, Francione
Matteson, Rosary
Monroe, Jean*
Rayder, Nicholas
Rice, Carol
Stewart, Ingjerd
Stripp, Steven*
Tanaka, Masako
Tate, Emma*
Taylor, JoEllyn
Taylor, Terry
Thoms, Denis
Uribe, Oscar*
Yinger, Joanne*

*Special acknowledgment is expressed to these staff members for their contribution to this unit.

Cover Design: Chet Tanaka

Illustrations: Kathy Mullinnix

Interior Design and Preparation: Aida Milbergs

Special Expression of Appreciation to:

Angelo Contreras, Jean Monroe, and Oscar Uribe, each of whom initiated components of a "parent unit" from which many ideas, forms and acitivities were taken and incorporated into this final version.

Nancy Cannon and Phyllis Loveless, Training Specialists at Honolulu Community College, for their invaluable suggestions after preliminary testing of the activities in this unit.

Glen Nimnicht, Ed.D., who envisioned a need for this unit and insisted that it be developed.

Dorothy Seiden, Ph.D., Psychologist, and Associate Professor of Home Ecomonics at San Francisco State University for her knowledge and sensitivity of the communication process, who spent many hours tirelessly reviewing this unit, and whose recommendations and suggestions have been incorporated into the final version.

ABOUT THE AUTHORS

ANGELA B. GARCIA is a Ph.D. candidate in Educational Psychology at Stanford University. She is experienced in educational program development, training and research. She has trained parent coordinators in community involvement techniques; elementary school staff in classroom management techniques; and developed and coordinated the ACECE Family Instructional Program teaching parents ways to enhance their children's intellectual and social development. She was an instructor at the Multicultural Institute at Canada College, and Program Associate for the National Urban/Rural School Development Leadership Training Institute at Stanford University. Her major emphasis is training educational staff and parents in strategies for self and interpersonal behavior management, cognitive and affective development especially in cross-cultural settings.

MARGARET S. ROBINSON is a network coordinator at the Far West Laboratory. She provides technical assistance to exemplary educational programs developed and approved by the Office of Education. Her area of emphasis is early childhood, and prior to her present assignment she was coordinator/trainer for the Early Childhood Flexible Learning System and coordinator/trainer for the Headstart Early Childhood Program. She has conducted teacher trainer workshops throughout the nation for preschool and elementary school teachers and administrators with many of the competency units in the Flexible Learning System. She has also presented several of the units at both national and state early childhood conferences. She has taught at the preschool level, is experienced in working with parents and is particularly concerned with the quality of interpersonal verbal and nonverbal communication between parents and teachers and between parents and children. She holds a B.A. from San Francisco State University in Home Economics, with emphasis in Early Childhood and Family Life and is currently enrolled in the master's program.

DENNIS C. SIMS, Ph.D. (Stanford University, Social and Institutional Development), is a consultant with, and co-founder of WREN Associates, educational and organizational consultants located in Stanford, California. He is an experienced, cross-cultural social systems analyst, former Chairman, Southeast Region, Society for General Systems Research; Professor of Sociology, Atlanta University Visiting Scholar, Stanford International Development Education Center; experienced in treatment and research in drug and alcohol abuse. He has done advanced study at the Western Institute for Group and Family Therapy and is a Clinical Member candidate, I.T.A.A. (International Transactional Analysis Association). Dr. Sims has led workshops in organizational change and community involvement for educators throughout the United States. He is currently working with WREN as part of an interdisciplinary multilingual team which provides on-going training to schools and other organizations, utilizing techniques in transactional analysis, behavioral and gestalt psychology, synectics and systems research, across cultural contexts.

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FOREWORD

This learning unit is about communications--with special emphasis on improving communications between parents and teachers. It is written for:

- teachers
- teacher assistants
- principals
- other adults who work with children and parents

It is not intended to be a cure all for improving your communication with parents, but will offer you opportunities to use and improve those communication skills that already work for you, and provide you with opportunities to practice some new ones.

These learning experiences will:

- help you identify what you want to communicate to others.
- help sensitize you to parent views, and help you offer them alternative ways to assist in the education of their children.
- give you practice in surveying and planning programs to build better parent and school staff communication and cooperation.

STRUCTURE OF THIS LEARNING MANUAL

Organization and Procedure

The ten sessions in this unit have been designed as workshops. Each will provide you with opportunities to build upon skills you already have and to practice new skills in workshops, family, and work settings. Each session will have a central theme, and will build upon what you have learned in the preceding sessions. The themes for each of the sessions will be:

Session 1: Clarification of Goals

2: Communication: Modes, Perception and Feedback

3: Communication and Awareness

4: Parent Roles in the Classroom

5: Facilitating Techniques

6: Communications and Problem Solving

7: Survey Designs

8: Parent Survey: Implementation and Feedback

9: Parent Survey Results and Implementation of Alternative Educational Roles

10: Conclusion

The usual format will be to begin each session with a warm-up by sharing and reviewing individual experiences you and other participants have had with the previous activity. After sharing your experiences, the theme of the current session will be explored. You will then have an opportunity to explore and discover how the theme or topic relates to your

own interest or particular situation. From time to time, you will be asked to assess the skills you are learning in terms of your objectives, and to review the objectives themselves to see if they require modification. Most sessions will conclude with an activity for the next session which is intended to organize your work and help you integrate the material you have already covered. These learning activities will give you an opportunity to practice some important communication skills:

1. How to respond to messages from someone else.
2. How to respond when you feel misinterpreted.
3. How to recognize nonverbal messages.
4. How to set reasonable goals that you can effectively implement.
5. How to encourage greater parent participation in your classroom.

Although the training will present opportunities for practice, it cannot substitute for creative implementation in the classroom and communication exchanges with parents of your students.

SUMMARY OF WHAT YOU CAN LEARN

This unit will provide you with opportunities to:

1. Obtain knowledge of the communication process and the interpersonal and cultural factors affecting its operation.
2. Clarify and set your own goals to achieve definite changes in your communications with parents.
3. Learn what factors are likely to contribute to problems in communication.
4. Build new skills in listening and in self-expression.
5. Develop new communication and listening skills and expand those you already have.

Although this unit will offer you many things, it contains no "magic." Instead, it presents opportunities for you to apply a number of principles to your own experiences. Your trainer is a guide who can provide you with information and suggestions, but there is no way s/he can know of the specific setting in which you work and how you may seek to apply what you learn. This unit will help you identify your own needs. Then, it is up to you to invest the necessary time and energy to acquire the skills you feel will be most useful, and to integrate your new and old skills into a comfortable means of achieving your own goals through more effective communication.

INTRODUCTION

In our communication system, listening and speaking are interrelated. Communication refers to the transfer of meaningful information between a sender and a receiver. This transfer of information takes place in different ways. Namely, we send information verbally and nonverbally, including words, tone of voice, body cues, and "body language."

Thus it happens that an individual can send different messages simultaneously in different ways, as in the case of a teacher whose "may I help you" is accompanied by an icy stare, rigid posture and menacing facial expressions. We usually hear the words correctly, but frequently misinterpret the meaning, because we fail to recognize that perceptions differ and we are unaware of the misinterpretations between what is felt and what is communicated.

Our reasons for misinterpretations vary. It could be because of the way we are sending the message, as in the case of the teacher, or it could be because what we see and hear is interpreted in terms of our own cultural background of experiences and attitudes. Many communication problems arise because we forget that individual experiences are not identical, and com[illegible]words may not evoke the same image in someone else's mind.

Our cultural heritage, including language and other symbols, influences the meaning we attach to the information we receive. It is our chief means of organizing and interpreting our environment even though it may be altered to some extent by psychological factors - adjustments individuals have made as a result of their unique experience in their culture. People reared in different variations of the same culture (i.e., the United States and England) share a wider variety of symbols than would probably be shared

by miners in Wales and fishermen in Hong Kong. However, even in these closely aligned cultures differences in language, both verbal and nonverbal, customs, values, and aspirations have evolved to form distinct cultural behaviors. All of these factors affect communication and must be taken into consideration.

The purpose of this unit is to help you develop more effective communications with the parents of your students, and to help them take a a more active role in the classroom. You will gain insight into the way people communicate - the different kinds of communication that exist and the reasons why we fail to communicate our messages and some reasons why they are often misinterpreted by the listener. You will also learn certain techniques that will help you communicate more clearly and sensitively, and help you deal more effectively with problems that arise.

SESSION I:

CLARIFICATION OF GOALS

Objectives:

To guide you in clarifying some of the difficulties that you experience in communicating with parents, and to have you set your own goals for achieving effective communication with parents.

In this session you will explore:

- Different modes of communication with parents.
- How to gather information to determine the effectiveness of your communications.
- The power that you have to accomplish your objectives.

ACTIVITY 1: Recalling a Personal Learning Experience

This exercise is intended to increase your self-awareness by putting you in touch with the feeling of accomplishment, of being in control of a situation and deriving as much benefit from it as possible. This sort of awareness will not only enhance your self-confidence, which is essential to effective communication, but will also help you to realize that you are actually capable of achieving the results that are important to you.

Start by feeling as relaxed as possible. Close your eyes or look at the ceiling and try to remember a time when you were really excited about something you had just learned to do, or a new skill you had just acquired. Re-envision that scene as if it were happening right now. Stay with this experience for a few minutes and when you are ready, write:

1. What are you doing?

2. What are you hearing?

3. What did you enjoy about your experience?

4. How did you use what you learned?

If you cannot remember such an experience off-hand, think of something that you would like to accomplish and fantasize yourself actually doing whatever it is well. Enjoy the feeling of excitement, satisfaction, pride, whatever, that comes when you realize a bit of your own potential.

Discussion of Activity 1

Look over the responses from your personal learning experience and share what was important to you about that experience with others in your group.

Jot down any additional ideas you may wish to remember as others share their experiences.

ACTIVITY 2: Becoming Clear About Your Own Goals and Expectations

The preceding activity gave you the opportunity to discover what was important to you about acquiring a new skill while experiencing a successful learning experience.

Hopefully, this exercise made you realize how much you can influence your own learning. To help you become clear about the goals and your own expectations for this learning unit, read the "Summary" (page 5) and the introduction (page 7) and browse through the unit. Try to get a good idea of the material presented here and how it relates to you and the way you communicate with parents. Then answer the following questions:

1. What changes would you like to see in your communication with parents?

2. How will training in this learning unit help bring about these changes?

3. What percent of the responsibility for learning from this unit will you assume for yourself?

4. How will you relate the skills and ideas of this unit to the changes you would like to make?

In order to accomplish anything, it is important to have clear objectives and be sincere about wanting to obtain them. Use this page to list the goals you have in communicating with parents. Be definite in stating these goals, "I will answer parents' notes the day I receive them," is a much more definite objective than "I will try to..." or "I would like to..." or I want to be able to...." When you word an objective in these ways you are giving yourself an out; you are not really committing yourself to anything. Commit yourself to better communications with parents. You will check this list several times as you work your way through the unit to see if you are approaching any of your goals, and to see if you need to make any changes, additions or modifications to the original list.

MY GOALS	CHECK ONE: Have Achieved	Have Yet To Achieve	Needs More Work On This Goal

ACTIVITY 3A: How I Communicate With Parents

The purpose of this activity is to start you thinking about the parents of children you are working with, and how you now communicate with parents. Briefly answer the following questions and share the answers with a partner in your group.

Focus on child teaching and learning situations you experience with your parents.

1. What is the concern most parents have about their children?

2. How do parents communicate their concerns to you?

3. Do you notice any similarity between parental concerns and your concerns for the children?

4. How do you think parents feel about their concerns?

5. What evidence is there to support your impressions?

6. What do you do now about your parents' concerns?

7. What would make the way you communicate with parents easier?

8. What would make the way you communicate with parents more effective?

ACTIVITY 3B: Communication Problems

Now that you have discussed some of the ways you communicate with parents, try to identify what difficulties you are having. Use this page to list what you think those difficulties are, then discuss them with members in your group. A volunteer will be needed to record your statements.

COMMUNICATION PROBLEMS

Note: This list of Communication Problems should be used in your planning for how to communicate with parents.

ACTIVITY 3C: Communication Survey

Some of the difficulties you may be having in communicating with parents might be due to your methods of communication. Think of as many alternatives as possible to the ways you communicate with parents now.

How would both you and your parents benefit from other communication methods?

Try to gather some information about the effect your communications have in this way:

1. For two weeks, keep a written record of the types and kinds of messages you send to parents, and the responses of the individual parents.
2. Survey all the parents you communicate with as to their preference for types of messages. Use the survey plan and form provided in this unit.

Note: This information will be used later in the unit.

SUGGESTED SURVEY FORMAT

You may use the following form to survey the types of communication parents of your children prefer, or you may want to develop your own form.

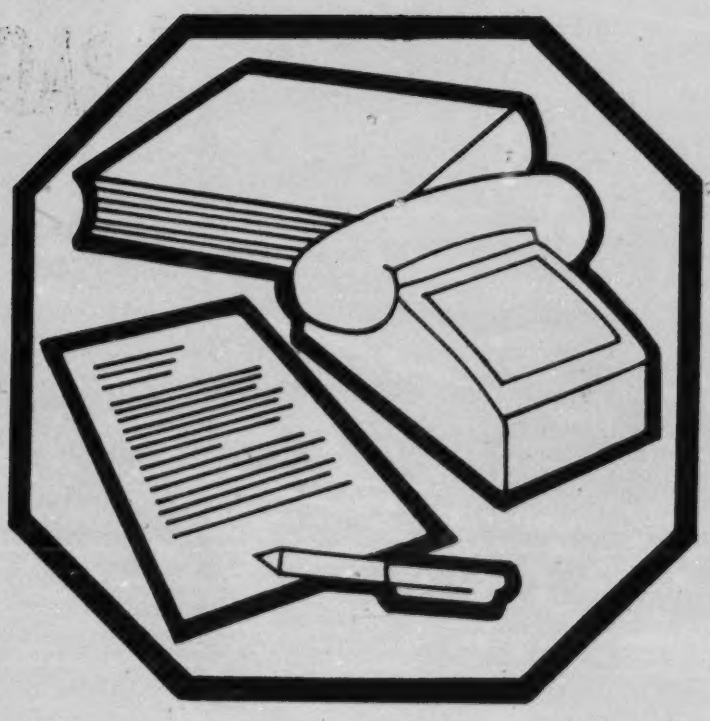
The following message types are most commonly used by schools in communicating with parents. You may want to survey your group of parents with respect to the type of communication they prefer.

Parent's Name _____

Date _____

Type of message	Reasons for preference/non-preference for this type of message
Report Card	
Notice	
Note	
Newsletter	
Bulletin Board	
Letter	
Still Photographic Exhibit	
Parent-Teacher Conference	
Telephone	
Home-Visit	
PTA Meeting	
Small Group Parent Meeting	
Open House	
Parent Workshops	

SESSION II:



COMMUNICATION: MODES, PERCEPTION AND FEEDBACK

Objectives:

To increase your awareness of what influences communication, and provide learning experiences in which you can describe and analyze these influences for a better understanding.

Session II will also:

- Help you find different ways to let parents know what you are communicating.
- Provide the opportunity to experience some of the things that affect our communications.
- Help you begin to look at how you communicate as a means of solving problems.

From time to time you will be asked to review your list of goals to determine how effective you are in communicating with parents and whether or not you wish to make any modifications or rewrite your goals.

ACTIVITY 4: Warm-up

When you think of the people we relate to most easily, it is those people we grew up with.....Our families, dearest friends, and relatives, people in our immediate community who share a similarity of background. But it is difficult to begin a relationship with a new person because we don't have the bonds of family, community and shared experiences to draw us together.

Answer the following questions, then discuss your responses with members of your group.

1. What has been your experience with parents of your students?

2. How do you work with parents?

3. How many parents do you work with in any particular school year?

Fill in the chart on the following page.

4. PARENT EXPERIENCE CHART

My Experience with Parents	How I Work with Parents

Note: Now may be a good time to review your goals to determine your relationship with parents or if you wish to make any changes.

COMMUNICATION MODES

There are many ways of communicating, and the way we choose to communicate influences how effective that communication will be. For example, a phone conversation is less personal than face to face communication. It restricts our attention to what is said plus intonations and inflections in the voice, but doesn't let us know how the other person feels through his/her body language. The way we communicate from "least to most personal", also produces different results in different situations.

The chart on the next page will help you classify your present way of communicating with parents and help determine how effective your way of communicating is. If after filling in the chart, you discover your communications are not effective, you will be able to tell what changes you need to make.

Take one specific example of an activity or related activities you planned for parents; e.g., parent-teacher visit, and fill in the chart using that example.

MODE AND RESULT OF COMMUNICATION CHART

Types of Communications

Impersonal Way		Personal Way			
Send dittoed note	Call info. only	Write personal note	Invite to school	Visit in home	Invite to your home
How many times? #	#	#	#	#	#
Successful results					
Unsuccessful results					
Appropriate-ness for activity					
Other suggestions					

Share the results of this activity with the group. This information will be used later in the unit.

EXERCISES IN COMMUNICATION AND FEEDBACK (Activities 5 and 6)

Objectives:

As a result of participating in the following activities you will be able to:

1. Describe different communication conditions and how they influence the amount and kind of feedback a person receiving a message gives a sender.
2. Describe what conditions will lead to the most rapid, accurately understood communication.
3. Describe some typical school communication settings.
4. Apply what you have learned in achieving 1, 2, and 3 to specific ways you will communicate to parents.

ACTIVITY 5: The Block Exercise (3 Parts)

In this activity you will need to work with a partner to perform several simple manipulations of blocks under three different conditions. As you participate in each of the different versions of this activity think of school/community situations which have some similarity, and daily experiences which pose problems similar to those being experienced in the exercise.

Materials needed:

Each learner will need seven hardwood building blocks that are exactly alike.

Please read all the instructions for this activity (each exercise) before you begin.

Exercise 1: Communication Without Feedback

1. Working in pairs, each learner (a "sender" and a "receiver") sits back to back with a partner.
2. Each are given an identical set (7) of hardwood building blocks.
3. One learner "the sender" builds a structure and instructs her/his partner "the receiver" to duplicate the same structure. The "receiver" may ask only that the instructions be repeated or indicate s/he is ready for an additional instruction. No feedback is allowed.
4. Take 3-5 minutes to complete this exercise.

Exercise 2: Communication With Feedback

1. Learners are to switch roles and repeat exercise one.
2. This time the "receiver" (who gave instructions in the first exercise) may now ask questions to get any additional information (feedback) from the "sender" to make the instructions easier to understand.
3. Take 3-5 minutes to complete this exercise.

Exercise 3: Communication From the Second Party. (Nine blocks are needed for this exercise.)

1. This exercise requires participation of the two learners and an additional person. This time, one learner gives instruction to his/her partner.
2. Learners sit back to back with one learner facing the third person.
3. The trainer builds a complex structure with nine blocks in front of one learner. The learner then instructs "the receiver" to duplicate the same structure. No communication is allowed between the third person and the learner giving instructions to his/her partner.
4. Take 3-5 minutes to complete this exercise.

ACTIVITY 6: Follow-up: Your Reactions

Take a few minutes to answer the following questions, then be prepared to discuss them with members of your group.

1. Describe your experience in each of the three exercises.

2. Did your performance improve? If so, what do you think helped you to improve?

3. How did your communications, verbal and nonverbal, affect your partner's experience?

4. How can you modify this exercise to illustrate other situations which are examples of communication problems?

Have your trainer or a recorder record these modifications on the board or newsprint pads.

Relate the different conditions under which you performed this exercise to the limitations of different ways of communication you worked on, on page 31, "Mode and Result of Communication."

Use the rest of this page to jot down what you learned from this experience and how you can apply what you learned in communicating with parents.

What I Learned	How I Will Apply It

List three ways you can think of in which feedback might be used to improve the relationship between teachers and parents.

1.

2.

3.

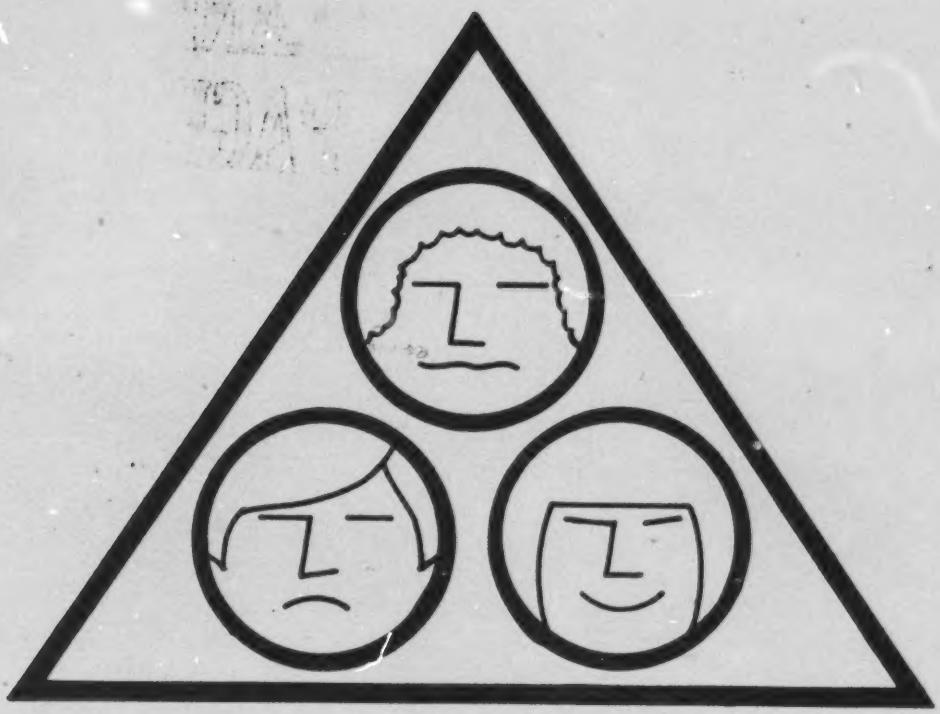
In what ways is this situation similar to what happens to you as a teacher in communicating complex information* to:

1. Parents?

2. Staff members?

* e.g., (1) complex curriculum determined by the state, with too little time to teach it; (2) parents visit during the day--wanting to help--task too complex and/or not enough time to give parents orientation.

SESSION III:



COMMUNICATION AND AWARENESS

Objective:

To increase your awareness of the multiple ways in which people communicate, especially through subtle nonverbal cues.

As a result of completing this session, you will be able to:

- Distinguish between meaning and what you see in communication.
- Describe specific instances in which you have experienced different nonverbal and verbal messages being "given off" simultaneously.
- Describe what happens when you attempt to transmit verbal messages which are in conflict with your "personal" feelings and perceptions of your situation.

Understanding Differences That Affect Communication

Educators by and large have yet to accept the reality of cultural differences, and have minimized its importance, even though cultural and ethnic groups in America have always tried to keep their separate identities. American children and their parents are culturally and ethnically distinct from each other. These basic differences, learned early in life, have much to do with structuring the use of space, time and materials. Teachers often overlook the consequences of having a child's senses being conditioned by one culture while trying to cope with the environmental impact of another.

Individuals act in meaningful ways through the medium of their own culture, which molds and patterns each of the sensory organs. Distorted communications result when the perceptual world of members of different cultural and ethnic groups is not taken into consideration.

Nonverbal Communication

Communication is a circular process, changing and developing as it continues. Nonverbal communication demonstrates behavior as effectively as spoken language. It is communicated through facial expression, dress, posture, laughter, space, time, and other pheonmena. It is difficult to separate the effect of time and space in our communications, because they are intricately related to one another.

Time is important in our communications. It is intricately related to the social process of interaction, and is experienced differently for each individual. Time as we use and express it is culturally determined and defined. It is a commodity with infinite messages. Some cultures manipulate it, buy, spend, sell, save, or waste it.

In our culture, we have quantified time by dividing it into years, seasons, months, weeks, days, hours, and so on. Not all cultures quantify time in this manner; those that do may assign different values to different time segments. Individuals also have different time scales and failure to recognize and take this into consideration can cause a breakdown in communications. Each person carries his own "clock" and it may or may not coincide with others. In the context of one's position (e.g., teachers and parents), an hour, a minute will be valued differently, both by society and by the individual. The interaction is sensitive in such communications, as in a glance at the wristwatch, gait, postures of relaxation, and protocols regarding promptness or casual arrival. Let's look closely at how time affects communication in our culture.

If you had a five o'clock appointment and showed up at 6--or didn't show at all, you would be communicating something. Being early or late communicates something. It is a projection in time of eagerness and looking forward to something. Take the expression "awhile". It is an important word in everyday communications. What does it really mean? Minutes, hours, days? "Awhile" means different things in different situations with different people. Our concept of time and our use of it depends upon our cultural and personal way of evaluating it.

When you are "on time", "behind time", early or late you express something in your culture. Failure to keep this in mind may lead to difficult, if not impossible, situations for communication; e.g., late arrival may create an atmosphere of hostility and prohibit meaningful communication.

Another aspect of time in communication is the difference between points and duration. Points are determined by a specified meeting place at an agreed-upon time. Failure to match these (points) up may result in communication failures.

Duration appears to have a beginning, an unsegmented middle, and an end. It is unmapped time, time spent waiting in the office to see the principal, in the hall to talk to a teacher, or just listening. Duration is experienced differently by individuals, and these differences in individual experiences can cause a breakdown in communication.

Our use of space is another way we communicate with each other. The distance between you and another person may determine the nature of the communication. If you are a few inches away from someone's ear, you will probably whisper and the communication will be "private". At a distance

of several feet, the communication may still be private, but its tone may change. If you are speaking to a large audience, the change will be even greater. The nature of the message will be partly determined by the distance between you and the audience.

There is also a cultural difference in the way we use formal space, e.g., in an office building. Europeans usually put their desk in the center of the room and authority flows outward from the center. Americans tend to distribute their working space around the edges of the office and leave the center open for traffic and communication. The size of the office also says something about the importance of the person, and partly determines the kind of communication that can be carried on.

Each of us also has private space we feel is our "own" -- a favorite chair, place at a table, or work area. Our private space is called territorality. It's like having our own plastic bubble around us. This bubble expands and contracts depending upon our degree of involvement in interaction with other people. Culturally defined space concepts help in identifying perception of stimuli in terms of privacy, intrusion, social distance and rejection. When this space is violated or someone gets too "close", we may become tense or hostile and communication may become more difficult. Americans prefer a certain distance for general conversations, feeling more comfortable if a certain space between themselves and the other person is maintained. Latins, on the other hand, are comfortable with less space.

In some situations we sacrifice our territorality and allow people to get closer to us temporarily, while in other situations this would be intolerable. How close we allow others to get to us is one measure of our

relationship to them and helps establish the kind of communication that will take place.

When we are face to face with another person it is important to remember that s/he is surrounded by their own plastic bubble and that violating that territory may make communications more difficult. As teachers interact more with parents from other cultures, it is important to remember that parents may see and attach importance to things that you may not see or attach significance to.

ACTIVITY 7: Exercises in Nonverbal Communication

When a person is experiencing strong feelings these feelings will be sensed even when they are not verbalized.

In this first exercise, the general principle of nonverbal communication will be illustrated by turning to the extremes of behavior and then by moving to more subtle nonverbal communication.

Role Play Exercises

1. To each member of a small group, pass out an identical statement. Then ask each member of the group to repeat the same statement with different voice inflections: e.g., "I felt I had to write you another letter, Mrs. Jones..."

   What are the reactions of your group?

2. Now imagine a parent you have known who was almost always angry when s/he came to a parent conference. How was this anger expressed in that parent's face?

In posture?

In gestures and movements?

3. Now imagine someone who is unhappy. How does this person's face express the unhappiness.

The posture?

Gesture and movements?

Laugh Exercise

Now try to make your partner laugh by telling your favorite joke, funniest story, or by sharing the funniest experience you ever had. When telling your story (joke/experience) keep in mind that the objective is to make you and your partner laugh as thoroughly and as long as you want. It is also perfectly O.K. to just stand and laugh (for 10 minutes) without telling a joke. When your laughter has subsided:

Look around at the people in the room. Notice your partner's eyes and posture.

Now observe yourself. What is different about your body?

Discussion of Activity 7

Now discuss your feelings about this experience in nonverbal communication with your partner. Share with the group if you are willing.

These exercises were intended to focus on the messages which are expressed in nonverbal ways, and to heighten your awareness of the two-way flow between behavior and feeling. Not only the feelings expressed in nonverbal behaviors, but a change in behavior--whether verbal or nonverbal--will produce changes in feelings.

After the laugh exercise, most people will feel more relaxed and comfortable; this feeling will in turn be expressed in greater body "looseness." There are two extremely important principles implied here:

1. You have the power to change your feelings by changing your behavior.

2. You can increase both your power and help others to increase their power to communicate by feeding back information on your perceptions and reactions to your partner.

ACTIVITY 8: Practice in Observing and Interpreting Nonverbal Communication

Objective:

This activity will provide you with an opportunity to focus upon behavior rather than labels or interpretations.

Instructions:

Please read all the instructions before you begin. This exercise requires that you assume three roles and work in groups of three. One person will be observed, one person will be the observer, and one person will be the timer.

To begin the exercise, seat yourselves facing one another. The observer is to observe her partner for one minute, doing whatever s/he likes, without any verbal communication, while being timed. The timer will let you know when one minute is up. The observer will then share with group members what the learner is doing and in what sequence, and give an interpretation of what s/he feels the behavior meant. For example, "I saw you wiggle from side to side and shift your shoulders back and forth and interpreted this to mean that you were anxious and wanted to leave the situation." Or, "I saw you stretch out your arms and legs and lean back in your chair with a grin on your face. I interpreted this to mean that you were relaxing and thinking of something amusing."

After the observer has described and interpreted the behavior, the observer should ask for feedback from the learner to determine if the interpretations are correct. If the interpretations are incorrect, the

learner is to clarify what s/he was feeling and discuss the basis for interpretation.

Then switch positions, until each member has had an opportunity to experience sending and receiving messages.

After three rotations discuss:

How did you feel in each role?

How accurate were each of you in giving precise descriptions and interpretations?

Following the discussion, write what you learned about yourself as a result of this experience. Share your findings if you are willing.

ACTIVITY 9: Conflicting Messages

The preceding activity was intended to sensitize you to the power and complexity of nonverbal communication by providing you an opportunity to practice observing and interpreting nonverbal behavior and communications.

This activity will focus on disqualifying and conflicting communications you probably have experienced. These are situations in which the verbal and nonverbal levels of communication do not reinforce one another but suggest at least two different messages and confuse the listener as to the intended message.

Instructions:

Try to remember a situation in which you experienced receiving conflicting messages at the verbal and nonverbal levels. When you have identified one such situation, try to imagine that person talking to you right now.

1. Briefly write your description of what you remember of the experience.

2. Describe how you felt.

3. What is the verbal message?

4. What do the facial expressions and body posture reveal to you?

5. Which of the different messages (i.e., verbal or nonverbal) do you respond to verbally?

6. What do you say?

7. What happens to your body? Do you draw closer? Avoid eye contact?

8. How would you respond to the same experience now?

9. How does the comfort level of the listener affect the level of communication?

Share this experience with members of your group, if you are willing.

As you listen to different experiences, focus on situations that are similar to ones you have been in. Consider, also, what skills you feel you need to work on to help you deal with similar situations you may encounter in the future.

Many people are taught in childhood that it is impolite to express their feelings. Some people believe this so thouroughly that they spend a great deal of energy searching for the "appropriate" thing to say and end up "giving off" double messages, because saying how they really feel is a risk.

The situation in which some people seek to convey "appropriate" messages which are different from what they are feeling is made more complicated when different cultural perspectives are added. A person attempting to convey something which is not felt may then be confronted with an interpretation of his or her behavior from a different cultural perspective. The possibilities for miscommunication, confusion, and mistrust under these conditions are enormous. This doesn't, however, make it necessary to tell everyone everything you think under the guise of being honest.

Note: You may want to take another look at your list of goals to decide if you want to make any changes at this time.

ACTIVITY 10: TV Viewing (Outside Assignment)

Watch a TV program, ideally a live interview, without the sound for one or two minutes.

1. Observe the nonverbal behaviors of the participants and write down what you saw and what you interpreted.

2. How do your perceptions fit with what you heard when you turned up the audio broadcast?

3. What about this experience is similar to how we communicate with others?

4. How do these experiences relate to your own situation, and can you begin to transfer these learning experiences into ways of helping to solve your own problem?

Share your reactions with the group.

ACTIVITY 11: Integration

Instructions:

Do this activity only if it is appropriate. Only you can make the decision. Review the activities in this session. Answer the following questions and discuss:

1. What did you like about this session?

2. What didn't you like about this session?

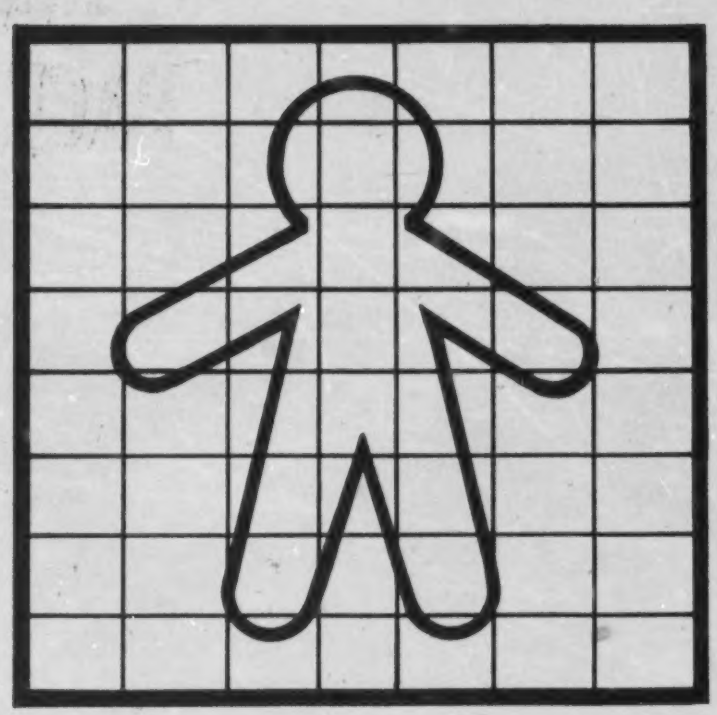
3. What did you get that you expected?

4. What didn't you get?

5. What was the most important thing you got for yourself.

6. How will you use the information you have gained here to work with your parents?

SESSION IV:



PARENT ROLES IN THE CLASSROOM

Objectives:

To help you further clarify your goals and the way you purpose to work with parents to obtain their help in designing the kind of program that will benefit both parents and students in your classroom. It will also help you get in touch with your attitudes about working with parents.

This might be a good time to check how positive your own approach is to parent involvement by completing the "Self-Assessment Instrument of Attitudes" on pages 67-68.

But before turning to the "Attitude Assessment", read over the criteria and behaviors indicating the presence of each criterion which is described on the following pages. Then rate yourself on the "Self-Assessment Instrument of Attitudes" on pages 67-68.

Criteria for Positive Attitude Towards Working With Parents

Rate yourself in terms of effectiveness of how close you have come to the goals you have set for yourself.

		Agree	Disagree
1.	As a teacher I feel at ease and comfortable when a parent enters the classroom.	[ ]	[ ]
Evidence:			
1.1	I promptly greet parents on arrival and ask how I can be of any assistance.	[ ]	[ ]
1.2	I share with parents the class plan for the day.	[ ]	[ ]
1.3	I ask parents if they would like to observe or to participate.	[ ]	[ ]
1.4	If parents want to participate, I offer them a choice of activities which they can supervise or conduct.	[ ]	[ ]
1.5	I help parents get started, and give them a copy of the class rules.	[ ]	[ ]
1.6	If parents want to observe, I show them the best places in the room to sit for a clear view of activities.	[ ]	[ ]
1.7	I discuss with the parent what observations might be of greatest use.	[ ]	[ ]
1.8	I inform parents where to go to smoke and give them a copy of class rules.	[ ]	[ ]
1.9	I set up a period at the end of the day to review with parents the days experiences.	[ ]	[ ]
2.	I feel comfortable and at ease when approached by parents about their child's learning activities.	[ ]	[ ]
Evidence:			
2.1	I have planned for specific learning activities for each child and I can share with parents these plans.	[ ]	[ ]
2.2	At the beginning of the year, I observed each child to discover his strengths and weaknesses.	[ ]	[ ]

3.	I believe that the role of parents is essential in the education of their children.	[ ]	[ ]
	Evidence:		
3.1	I met with each child's family to talk about what the family feels is good education for their child, and share the teacher's notion of what is good for their child.	[ ]	[ ]
3.2	Discuss the child's progress with the child's family.	[ ]	[ ]
3.3	I have obtained to the best of my knowledge accurate and current information on the child.	[ ]	[ ]
3.4	I have a plan for the child's future growth.	[ ]	[ ]
3.5	I discuss general curriculum goals with parents at the beginning of the year to get their input and approval.	[ ]	[ ]
3.6	I talk with parents to get their approval before any information is entered in child's cumulative file.	[ ]	[ ]
3.7	I discuss all tests with parents to get their approval before testing children.	[ ]	[ ]
3.8	If parents disapprove of tests, other evaluative measures or tests are used that meet parent approval.	[ ]	[ ]
3.9	I take a representative group of books and classroom materials to parents to see if parents feel they are ethnically relevant to their child's background.	[ ]	[ ]
4.	I have set up a training or orientation program for parent volunteers to acquire skills needed to work effectively in the classroom.	[ ]	[ ]
	Evidence:		
4.1	Parent volunteers meet once a week as a group with the teaching team to discuss a phase of the program. As an example, parents could organize and attend a workshop on ways to set up and conduct an art activity.	[ ]	[ ]
5.	I feel parents are the best source of information and are competent to make decisions about:	[ ]	[ ]

Evidence:

5.1	Who teaches their children.	[ ]	[ ]
5.2	Whether their children should be physically punished.	[ ]	[ ]
5.3	How the school budget is spent	[ ]	[ ]
5.4	What the Parent Coordinator should do.	[ ]	[ ]
5.5	What the powers of the Advisory Committee should be.	[ ]	[ ]
5.6	Whether or not their children may eat in school.	[ ]	[ ]
5.7	Who needs social services.	[ ]	[ ]
5.8	Who should see the nurse.	[ ]	[ ]
5.9	When parents may observe the classroom.	[ ]	[ ]
5.10	What tests their children may be given.	[ ]	[ ]
5.11	What type of training volunteers should have.	[ ]	[ ]
5.12	What parents may do in the classroom.	[ ]	[ ]
5.13	What kind of training parents should have.	[ ]	[ ]
6.	I support paraprofessionals in their role as teaching assistants.	[ ]	[ ]

Evidence:

6.1	I encourage the teaching assistants to use their skills at home with their own children.	[ ]	[ ]
6.2	I use the skills of the teaching assistants to help me understand and work with other parents.	[ ]	[ ]
6.3	I allow teaching assistants to move freely about the classroom conducting activities and growing at their own pace.	[ ]	[ ]
6.4	I encourage teaching assistants to use their own language or dialect in the classroom with children and other parents (promoting communication without putdowns).	[ ]	[ ]

SELF-ASSESSMENT INSTRUMENT OF ATTITUDES

In the box beside each item, place a check (✓) if you agree or feel that way. If you disagree, leave the box blank. This is your assessment. No one will see it; so be honest with yourself.

Before you begin, try a sample item: Check (✓) only if you agree.

1. I believe parents have a right to spank their children.
2. I believe parents are competent enough to decide when their children go to bed.

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1. I feel comfortable and at ease whenever a parent enters my room. [ ]
2. I feel comfortable and at ease when approached by parents about their child's learning activities. [ ]
3. I am willing to serve as a member of a committee in which only parents have voting rights. [ ]
4. I am willing to set up a training program for parents/volunteers who come to my class in order to prepare them for para-professional positions. [ ]
5. I believe parents have a right to control the education of their children. [ ]
6. I feel comfortable having parents as voting members of any screening and hiring board for staff. [ ]
7. I feel parents are the best source of information about their children. [ ]

8. I support paraprofessionals in their roles as parents and teaching assistants. [ ]

9. I believe paraprofessionals should not lose their rights as parents by being hired into the program. [ ]

Add up the checks and record total here. _____

Discussion

Now that you have finished the "Attitude Assessment", discuss following questions with members of your group, and use the rest of the page to write things you would like to remember from your discussion.

1. What did you find useful about filling out the form and thinking about these topics?

2. How do the results relate to your goals for communicating with parents?

3. How does your attitude affect the role of parents in your classroom?

4. What would you like your following sessions of this unit to include?

5. Are you willing to take the responsibility to insure that these inclusions are made?

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Now that you have had an opportunity to discuss your feelings about parent involvement, answer the following questions.

1. How do you now feel about working toward your goals?

2. What might stop you from achieving your goals?

3. Share your goals and what obstacles might prevent you from achieving them.

4. Discuss how these obstacles may be removed or their impact diminished with your partner and share with the total group if you are willing.

BEHAVIOR CHART

Choose a partner and discuss the feelings/behaviors you feel keep parents from forming a closer relationship with teachers.

Fill in the appropriate column on the chart below and then decide how these feelings/behaviors apply to the difficulties you feel you are having. Choose three items that are significant to you. Set your priorities and decide what you want to work on first.

BEHAVIOR CHART

Behaviors/feelings that are barriers	Three things I will work on

Below are some generally useful techniques and strategies for involving parents in the classroom. How many do you now practice?

1. Greet parents by name and engage in friendly conversation when the child is brought and picked up from school.

2. Send notes and samples of the child's work home.

3. Make phone calls inviting parents to school programs.

4. Provide a place for parents to have coffee, and baby-sitting, if possible.

5. Plan or have parents plan more formal meetings.

6. Seek help from parents with special projects.

7. Form special groups of parents with children who have special problems; e.g., hearing, reading and speech.

8. Schedule conferences on a regular basis, not just when the child is having a problem.

Use the rest of this page to write down other techniques and strategies that are not listed here, and share with the group. Have a recorder write them on newsprint or on the chalk board.

ACTIVITY 12: Parent Roles in the Classroom

Objectives:

To examine roles parents now have in your classroom and to generate some new and alternative roles.

Any discussion of improving communications with parents should lead to a closer look at the roles parents play in the classroom. Improved communications between the teacher and parents will facilitate active participation and cooperation of parents in daily class life. In this activity, you will generate some new ideas or rethink old ones for roles parents can play and look at the benefits for teachers, parents, and children. These ideas should be shared and discussed by the group. In Session VII, you will prepare to gather the same sort of ideas from the parents themselves.

1. List what alternative roles/activities you would like parents to see available in your classroom.

2. What would you do differently to insure that parents would see these alternatives as available in your classroom?

3. If you were to make any of the changes you and others thought of, what benefits would such changes offer to you? List the benefits.

4. What benefits would participating parents be likely to see in each of the activities for themselves? List the benefits.

5. Imagine that you are a parent of one of your students. As an interested parent, you come to visit the teacher of your child and the teacher expresses a desire for greater parental involvement. As you listen to this teacher and look around the classroom, what activities do you see that you can do? What roles do you think this teacher will welcome your involvement in? List those activities and roles that are available to you.

ACTIVITIES	ROLES

Share with the total group if you are willing.

ACTIVITY 13: Looking Forward

In the next two sessions, you will have an opportunity to learn and practice tools of listening and problem solving. These techniques, active or reflective listening, and the itemized responses are intended to be tools for the achievement of your goals. The benefits which you achieve from their use will depend upon your judgment. If you have chosen goals to which you are committed, these new tools will help you deal with difficult situations, share responsibility for solving problems with each of those involved and maintain an attitude of respect for the integrity of others.

Objective:

The objective of this activity is to increase your awareness of your choice between facilitating and hindering modes of communication. You will also be able to describe for yourself what means you use to hinder or inhibit communication. Finally, you will be able to choose what areas you would most like to focus on in your practice sessions and in future assignments.

Read "Conditions That Support Open Communication" for background information on the following page.

CONDITIONS THAT SUPPORT OPEN COMMUNICATION

When you share things about yourself, or reactions and perceptions you have about the other person, you are being open. As two people find that there are an increasing number of things that can be shared in mutually helpful ways, a mutual trust develops.

There may be many things about oneself or reactions to a particular person that are not appropriate or relevant to that relationship. When inappropriate things are shared, or shared things seem to be used in hurtful ways, trust and openness decrease. There is always some risk involved when one tries sharing a new kind of information in a particular relationship. It is the risk of whether that sharing will lead to increase or decrease of trust and openness. The risk also includes the good or bad feelings that accompany such experiences.

When two people have a mutual care for helping each other grow and good communication skills for understanding each other's intentions as well as ideas and feelings, increasing areas of sharing become appropriate. Trust, risk-taking, mutual caring and good communications skills are conditions that support open communications.

One set of skills that especially influence development of openness lies in the use of responses to the other's risk of sharing. When he takes a chance of sharing with you, your response may tend to have a freeing effect on him. Or, it may tend to have a binding or closing off effect on him. Here are lists of behaviors that generally tend to have freeing effects or binding effects when responding to another's sharing.

Freeing Effects: affecting other's autonomy as a person; increases others sense of equality.

active, attentive listening: Responsive listening, not just silence.

paraphrasing: Testing to insure the message you received was the one he sent.

perception check: Showing your desire to relate to and understand him as a person by checking your perception of his inner state; showing acceptance of feelings.

seeking information to help you understand him: Questions directly relevant to what he has said, not ones that introduce new topics.

offering information relevant to the other's concerns: He may or may not use it.

sharing information that has influenced your feelings and viewpoints. Directly reporting your own feelings.

offering new alternatives: Action proposals offered as hypotheses to be tested.

Binding-Cueing Effects: Affecting other's autonomy by increasing others sense of subordination.

changing the subject without explanation: For example, to avoid the other's feelings.

explaining the other; interpreting his behavior: "You do that because your mother always...." Binds him to past behavior or may be seen as an effort to get him to change.

advice and persuasion: "What you should do is....."

vigorous agreement: Binds him to present position--limits his changing his mind.

expectations: Binds to past. "You never did this before. What's

wrong?" Cues him to future action, "I'm sure you will...." "I know you can do it."

denying his feelings: "You don't really mean that." "You have no reason to feel that way!" Generalizations, "Everybody has problems like that."

approval on personal grounds: Praising the other for thinking, feeling or acting in ways that you want him to, for conforming to your standards.

disapproval on personal grounds: Blaming or censuring the other for thinking, acting, and feeling in ways you do not want him to; in putting unworthy motives to him.

commands, orders: Telling the other what to do. Includes, "Tell me what to do!"

emotional obligations: Control through arousing feelings of shame and inferiority. "How can you do this to me when I have done so much for you?"

THE EFFECT OF ANY RESPONSE DEPENDS UPON THE DEGREE OF TRUST IN THE RELATIONSHIP.

The less trust, the less freeing effect from any response. The more trust, the less binding effect from any response.

SESSION V:

FACILITATING TECHNIQUES

Objectives:

1. To help you distinguish irrelevant from relevant paraphrasing.
2. To define "reflective listening."
3. To use the paraphrase to improve communication when content and emotion is in a message.
4. To identify appropriate conditions for paraphrasing.
5. To define itemized responses.
6. To use itemized responses in problem solving.

Part I

Beginning with this session we will focus more and more on specific skills and specific settings you can use to produce more effective communications with parents. We will also review and elaborate upon some of the earlier activities in an effort to help you integrate new and old skills in a style which is comfortable for you.

The next two sessions will focus on nonverbal expression. They are intended as an opportunity to practice skills you will need in designing, implementing, and following up the parent survey. Remember that effective communication is not solely a matter of technique. Mechanically perfect

reproduction of a skill or technique will not compensate nor even disguise a basic mistrust of others. This fundamental point deserves more elaboration.

In any communication's system there is some "noise." That is, there are some different signals carried, which obscure and which may even drown out the message that was intended, for example, static on a radio or "snow" in television. When teachers seek to increase parental involvement, they will frequently find themselves in a system contaminated by a great deal of "noise." In this session we will work to facilitate the unraveling snarled communication and to penetrate noise with clear signals.

In the introduction, we stressed how perception and interpretation can vary widely between persons, particularly where the communicators come from different ethnic groups, or different subcultures. It is the difference in perception and interpretation of the same message/experience which is the raw material for miscommunication. No technique will overcome behavior which is interpreted by a parent as a "put down" from a teacher or a put down from a parent.

As a result of a long historical process, schools have been isolated from parents and some parents, particularly those not in the "power elite" may perceive with good reason, that they are not welcome and not respected.

If your goal is to work more effectively with parents, then you will have to achieve an understanding of the value of parents, particularly as continuous educational influences, sources of love and security for the child and crucial in development of the child's self-concept. Most schools of education have courses in socialization and in sociology of education where material is presented on the roles of the mass media, the family environment, the cultural and social trends of society, peer influence and other informal

sources of education. However, when it comes time to design the specific unit that will be presented to the first grade class at Mount Vernon School, sociological and cultural factors can go by the board. And it is too easy for one unit after another to become part of this sequence until a teacher is led to think of herself as the primary educational influence in the life of the child.

The last step, in turn can support the next: a view of others as facilitators of the teacher's educational goals. The problem is that a teacher is only one of many who will pass through the child's life and will be present for not even a whole year at a time. The parents are there, continuously, and particularly when the child internalizes the adult's role as an extension of his or her parents. Without support and reinforcement from the child's parents, the teacher's job will be an uphill battle indeed.

What do these factors have to do with facilitating techniques? When we put all of this information together, we can build a model.

1. All communication systems contain some "noise."
2. Educational systems have noise built into both teachers' perceptions and interpretations of parents and the reverse.
3. Miscommunication becomes more likely when signals are masked by noise.
4. Trans-cultural communication requires flexible perception of signals which mean different things to different people.
5. The overcoming of miscommunication requires an assumption of good will as a common endeavor for both participants; otherwise, misinterpretations will be used as "evidence" to bolster antagonistic positions.

If you are going to profit from these techniques then you will bring to them a satisfaction with your own value as a person--at least to the extent that you do not need to always "prove" your worth--and a respect for dignity and worth of others--at least to the extent that you assume that when dealing with parents that they want the best life possible for their children and that includes a good education.

Discussion

1. Discuss with a partner the issue of style or techniques teachers use to communicate with parents.

2. Think about those activities/communications that worked with parents for you and why.

3. Compare those activities that worked with those activities that do not work.

4. What is their relationship, if any?

5. How do you account for their effectiveness or ineffectiveness?

Facilitating Techniques - Part II

In the first part of this session you were encouraged to re-examine your attitudes and intentions with respect to parent involvement in the classroom. In this section you will be supplied with information and exercises which will improve your listening and verbal response skills.

Listening is not highly valued in our culture, or seen as a problem, and therefore, is almost never taught in school. We learn from the models we copy, even though they may not be good models.

Listening is usually seen as trying to figure out as quickly as possible the "core" of another person's message, and this "core" is carefully screened by the listener's preconceived idea of what the other person is going to say. The listener "tunes out" and "rehearses" or prepares his own statement on the subject without full benefit of having heard the complete message. Once we have become skilled listeners, we will observe that it is more the rule than the exception that people talk at one another rather than with one another.

Carl Rogers says that poor listening is an important obstacle to the communication block. Our primary reaction is to evaluate from our own point of view what has just been said to us. Real communication occurs when we listen with understanding and do not immediately evaluate the other person's messages. In this way we can see the idea or feeling from the other person's point of view, to sense how it feels to him, and to get into his frame of reference.

This takes courage to try to understand another person in this way and if you are willing to enter his private world and see the way a thought, idea, feeling, or action appears to him, without any attempt to make

evaluative judgments, you run the risk of being changed yourself. This understanding or willingness requires flexibility. You just might see it his way. You might find yourself influenced in your attitudes by what he is saying. The risk of being changed can be frightening. If we had to listen to a speech by the leader of an unfriendly nation, how many of us would dare to try to see the world from his point of view? The great majority of us would not listen. We would find ourselves forced to evaluate, because listening would seem too dangerous.

Just listening and not talking is a valuable form of communication. Listening silently often permits the other person to find out his own answers. How many times have you said to a friend, "Listen to this problem I've got." You proceed to tell him about it, and he just listens intently. Suddenly you say, "Oh, I've got it. I know what I can do about it. Thanks for helping me!" Silent listening often leads to self-directed change. Silent listening can communicate acceptance, and feelings of acceptance foster constructive communications.

There are certain barriers to listening that make it difficult for us to hear what someone else is really saying. Some of these barriers are:

1. Thinking about something else, being preoccupied with something that's in our own thoughts.
2. Thinking "I've heard that before."
3. Prejudging or evaluating what the other person is saying. This is probably the single most important barrier to listening. We all have a natural tendency to prejudge what someone else is saying. Most arguments are based on people's not checking out

their assumptions about what another person is saying.

4. Jumping to conclusions. "Oh, I know what he's getting at"--before he gets there.
5. Rehearsing our response. Our ego says we want our own viewpoint to be heard. We often give a superficial "yes, but..." acknowledgment and want to get our own point of view.
6. Not wanting to hear...We're threatened and insecure; there's no trust.
7. Hearing what we want to hear. The other person's thoughts and feelings are going through our own "screen," and that "screen" gets closed down when we hear another point of view that we don't agree with.

The solution for open communication is to create a situation in which each of the different persons comes to understand the other from the other's point of view.

Defensiveness, fears, unwillingness to risk, and lack of trust drop away as people find that the only intent of the other person is to understand and not to judge. The dropping of some defensiveness of one person leads to further dropping of defensiveness by the other, and mutual communication can occur.*

*From Problem Solving with Children, Joanne Yinger, Flexible Learning System, Far West Laboratory.

ACTIVITY 14: Listening

1. What did you discover about your listening skills? List five or 6 reasons why listening is important to you.

2. What effect does this have on the way you communicate?

3. Why is listening without evaluating so important?

ACTIVITY 15: Use of Conversation — Irrelevant Responses

Irrelevant responses are those in which one party interjects comments of interest to him/herself in the context of the other's statements without listening or furthering the trend of thought.

Examples

Parent: I'm worried about my child's clothing being lost at school.

Teacher: Wow did I ever have a rough day!

Parent: I'm interested in volunteering in the room.

Teacher: I really don't know what got into those kids today. They just wouldn't sit still.

Instructions

1. Define irrelevant responses in your own words, and give at least three examples from your own experiences.

2. Discuss this information with a partner.

ACTIVITY 16: Inhibiting Conversation

Choose a partner to role play this exercise and decide who is to go first. The first party (A) will begin speaking about any topics s/he wishes. The second party (B) will listen with an attentive look. After A has continued for a few sentences, B will nonverbally indicate disagreement by frowning, shaking the head or whatever seems appropriate. Then interrupt A by saying, yes, but, and offer his/her disagreement.

A will let B continue for a few sentences, then indicate disagreement nonverbally as above, then interrupt with a counter-argument. Continue this sequence for two or three interchanges.

After you have finished communicating in this manner, (1) each of you tell your partner how you felt the first time you noticed the nonverbal signal of disagreement; (2) each of you tell how you felt when you began your nonverbal signal and also how you felt when you interrupted.

This exercise may have seemed familiar to you. Perhaps you have experienced this frequently. Reflect on how you felt after a few rounds of this interchange. It may have been very entertaining and you may think of contexts in which this type of interaction was "lots of fun." It may also have been very competitive and threatening--particularly if the role-playing hit a sensitive area. Whether or not this was a literally familiar interchange for you, you do not have to continue conversing in this fashion and a later exercise will demonstrate some alternatives. Next we will practice banal communication.

ACTIVITY 17: Banal Conversation

Working in groups of two (learner A and learner B) you and a partner are to discuss any topic that either of you are interested in. As learner A is speaking, learner B will listen until something is said which B can use to change the subject/topic to her/his own interest. Likewise, while B is speaking, A will listen for an appropriate cue to introduce a new topic of interest. When interrupting, use a phrase to heighten the impact such as--"yes, that reminds me that...," "speaking of,...," "I'm glad you mentioned that..." or "I know just what you mean..."

After practicing this exercise for five minutes, discuss how you felt during the conversation.

1. Did you feel closer or more distant from your partner? What contributed to your feeling this way?

2. Have you been in situations like this before? If so, describe them and share what happened in these situations if you are willing.

3. Describe what you might do to make changes even more vital to the person sending the message, and the person receiving the message.

Paraphrasing

The typical outcome in the previous exercise is that one party or both eventually become disinterested or threatened by further conversation and abandon attempts to participate. Normally, conversations which proceed in either of the above fashions will not express much feeling at the direct verbal level although at the nonverbal level the participants may react to the irrelevance or competition with whatever nonverbal signals are appropriate to their feelings. One cure of this type of communication is paraphrasing or "reflective listening."

The basic idea behind paraphrasing is for the receiver to repeat what the speaker said in the receiver's own words. In this way you check with the speaker to see if your perception of the message was correct.

In previous sessions we have explored implications of nonverbal behavior, gestures, spacing, etc. in terms of different meanings. You are aware that different gestures have different meanings and may not at all be intended to express what a receiver thinks they are meant to communicate. This fact also applies to words, but is often overlooked. Paraphrasing will help you to discover if indeed your understanding of the speaker is in fact what the speaker wishes to communicate. It is also important to give the speaker feedback to let him/her know what effects he is having upon you and how you think s/he is feeling. In using this skill, you are likely to find that you obtain more positive results if you identify your own opinion as yours; e.g., "The impression I get is," or "I hear you saying..." or "I understand you to mean." By clearly identifying your opinion as your own instead of "right now you are aggravated and angry," greater flexibility of response can be introduced. You are less likely

to be seen as making declarative, "know-it-all" statements and more likely to be seen as stating what you perceive, correctly or incorrectly, at the present time.

ACTIVITY 18: Paraphrasing

The objective of the following exercise is to give you practice in paraphrasing, as you go through the process of clarifying meanings.

Instructions

You will need to work in groups of three. One person will assume the role of learner A, one, learner B, and the third person will be the observer (two learners and one observer).

Read the instructions completely before you begin. Allow 5 minutes for this exercise.

Learner A makes a short statement about a topic which is of interest or concern to you, politics, job, personal life, whatever.

Learner B listens emphatically and attentively.

When A has finished, respond by "What I think you mean is...," "What I think you are saying is" or "Are you saying...?" If you have strong feelings or you experience the other as having a strong feeling about the subject under discussion, then reflect that back to the speaker as well. Use an appropriate qualifier such as, "What I think you are saying is..." and "I feel...when you say that." Do not analyze the statement or attempt to infer why A said what s/he did.

When B has finished with the interpretation, A will add whatever clarification seems appropriate. If A makes a clarification, B then paraphrases once more to allow A to verify once more. You are more likely to increase your accuracy if you concentrate on the key words, the words with

greatest emphasis in the sentence, and ask yourself, what does A's statement mean to me? Continue with clarifications and paraphrasing until A says "That is exactly what I meant," and says this with agreeing non-verbal expression. Then reverse positions with B making the opening statement.

The paraphrase is a very important tool. What it enables you to do for yourself is to check what you think the other said with what s/he meant to see whether your interpretation was accurate. Simultaneously, while getting information for yourself you supply the other person with information on how s/he is being heard. Likewise, you can supply information on how you feel and how you are experiencing the feelings of the other. For example:

A. "I'm getting really down. There's just so much to do!"

B. "Right now I see you looking at all the work left to do and feeling very frustrated and depressed, is that right?"

If your paraphrase is "right on," you can then receive an acknowledgement from the other of your position, and acknowledgement of the other's responsibility for how s/he feels and you can choose whether to share your own feelings of a similar instance in which you felt the same way or suggest an alternative such as, "Think about all the work that you have accomplished so far" or, "How do you feel about what you have already accomplished?"

In paraphrasing, you acknowledge your awareness of the other person, demonstrate a concern and gather information to make further decisions.

Part of this process becomes one sequence in a chain of problem solving activities. Problem solving and the use of another tool, the itemized response, will be dealt with in Session VI.

ACTIVITY 19: Follow-up

1. Record at least three to five instances of practicing paraphrasing and reflective listening with a partner.

2. How can you use this skill when communicating with parents and others?

3. Give one or two examples of your experiences where you could have applied the use of paraphrasing.

ACTIVITY 20: Assessing Your Progress

To check your progress, answer the following four questions and turn them into your trainer. This will let the trainer know if s/he is achieving his/her goal of getting the concepts presented in this unit over to you.

1. Are you getting what you want from working with parents?

2. What would you like to be done differently in the workshop?

3. What would you like more emphasis placed upon?

4. What do you feel you will have accomplished when you finish five more sessions?

If the book is available, please read pages 3-56 of SYNECTICS: THE DEVELOPMENT OF CREATIVE CAPACITY, William J. Gordon (New York: Macmillan, 1961).

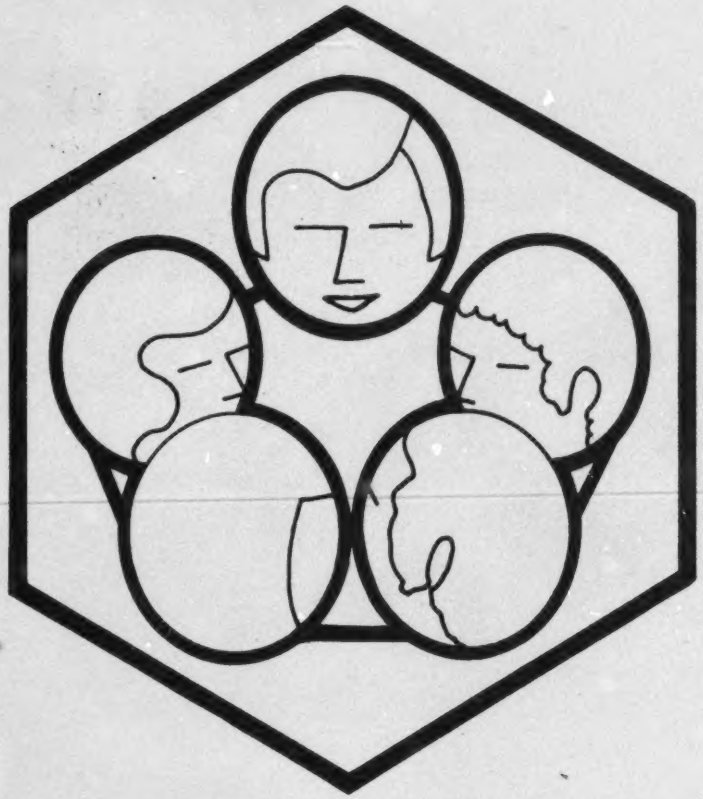
Trainer Decision Point

At this point the group will have worked very hard and it may be advisable to wrap up this session by giving an assignment to practice paraphrasing and reflective listening with family and close friends in the coming week. In the event of this decision, the assignment will be:

1. Practice and record instances and outcomes of the use of paraphrasing and reflective listening with family and close friends in the coming week.

2. Be prepared to share the outcome of your experience with the group during the next session.

SESSION VI:



COMMUNICATIONS AND PROBLEM SOLVING

All relationships encounter difficulties in communication. An effort to bridge cultural, class and institutional differences by bringing about greater parent involvement will bring forth many problems both for teachers and parents. And since our school systems have overstressed analysis and problem recognition, group problem solving is a difficult, even painful experience in our culture. Perhaps the near universal sigh of frustration at the announcement of another staff or committee meeting is spontaneous evidence of this.

Preparation which stresses clear communication can increase understanding among participants in committee meetings and clear communication of different perspectives can lead to better solutions to individual and organizational problems.

Problem Solving

The previous activities provided practice in listening and feedback. These skills are a vital part of problem solving and the following discussion will utilize them as the foundation for building new problem stating and solution finding skills.

At the outset you should be aware that in our society there is a great deal of confusion about what constitutes problem solving. Some of the difficulty stems from identifying problem solving with problem analysis--

finding difficulties in complex issues, taking ideas apart and putting them back together. This is only partially correct. Problem solving also involves generating strategies or steps for reaching goals and solving the problem. This process is facilitated by removing an idea from its normal context and then rebuilding it into a new context; however, this process is inhibited rather than facilitated by analysis--particularly when group problem solving is required.

The Problem Solving Process

Creative solutions are novel, unexpected, and of broad general applicability. In order for people to be able to work together for novel solutions, they must find both a way of making the context of a problem interesting enough so that hackneyed, run-of-the-mill "answers" are not dredged up and used in superficial fashion as "solutions", and a way of making the strange and unfamiliar source of ideas comfortable so people can work with them. As many of you know from experience, this is a very difficult communications problem. One of its basic requirements is that the learners participating in the problem solving task feel free to take risks in innovating ideas and refrain from emotional, personal over-identification with "immediate solutions" even if they thought of them themselves!

Problem Solving: Approach and Techniques

One way of analyzing the problem solving process is to divide it into two steps. The first step is stating the problem. The second step is finding a solution.

Stating the Problem

There are many sub-problems to this process. The crucial step is to identify what it is that you want to change and what limitations you are placing on a solution. The following questions illustrate the problem solving process very well.*

1. Do I really own my problem? How do I want to or have to solve it? Do I "own" this problem enough to be responsible for taking some steps to solve it?

2. What are my goals? What do I want to accomplish? What kind of a solution am I hoping for? What do I want to change? What have I already done about it that has or has not worked?

3. How many new ideas can I think up? Do I need ideas from others? Which idea is the best one that will help me reach my goal? Will the idea I choose change the situation so that it will be more acceptable, even for the next few moments?

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* Questions devised by Joanne Yinger FWL.

4. How can I use or implement that idea? What is my plan for making that idea work?

5. How can I make my plan work? What are my next steps? What will I do about it tomorrow? Is my plan different or new enough to reach my goal? Is it a feasible plan? Can I really carry it out?

6. Did my plan work? How well? Did I solve my problem? If not, what part of the plan worked or didn't work? If yes, did I discover another problem or question to answer?

These questions provide an overall framework for the problem solving process. Questions 1-3 are primarily concerned with problem stating, 4-5 are concerned with devising solutions and 6 is concerned more with evaluation.

Finding a Solution in Groups

The problem solving process in groups is a bit more complex. In order to reach a creative group solution, it is necessary that each learner feel free to generate and apply ideas which may seem very remote from the original area in which the problem is first stated. But in order to problem solve creatively in a group setting, several conventions of our culture have to be overcome. Restrictions against fantasy and against "appearing impractical" must be over-ridden. This is the objective of the itemized response.

Itemized Response

An itemized response is a response to an idea which focuses on two different aspects of an idea in a specified sequence. Identifying what you like about an idea gives those generating solutions information about what aspects of solutions you find attractive and useful. Identifying your concerns gives them clues about what will not work with you and helps them focus on solutions that will.

The first aspect in the sequence will be comments on what the receiver likes, finds useful or stimulating about the idea. The second aspect will include statements on the concerns the listener has about the idea and what else the receiver needs in order to implement the idea. For example:

Speaker A: I want more parents to attend my "School and Society" lecture series.

Speaker B: Send out a letter with personalized notes.

Speaker A: I really like the idea of personalization. How can I develop that in a way that the same old faces won't be the entire audience?

Note: Speaker A did not say, "Oh, I've tried that before and all I get is the same old faces."

Discuss the difference between "Finding a Solution", and the "Itemized Response" with a partner.

1.

2.

SAMPLE PARENT-TEACHER PROBLEM SOLVING

When a parent comes with a problem.

Problem: "My child doesn't want to come to school."

1) Reflect back his feeling: "This must concern you and cause problems in the morning too."

2) Clarify the problem: "Tell me a little more - How does he act? What does he say? What do you do? This is what I see at school."

3) Raise the alternatives: "Let's talk about what to do."

   Teacher: Let's think about what we can do. (Both parent and teacher give ideas.)

   a) Let him stay home when he doesn't feel like coming.

   b) Come with him.

   c) Give him a treat when he comes.

   d) Tell him its time for school and put him on the bus or leave him with his teacher.

   e) Wait till he's older.

4) Encourage action - involving both parent and teacher.

   Teacher: What do you want to do?

   Parent: I think I'll try putting him on the bus. Or I think I'll leave him with the teacher even if he is crying.

   Teacher. Good, then I will do everything here to make him feel welcome and to help him get involved while he's here.

5) Plan for follow-through

   Teacher: Let's both observe how he feels about school and discuss our observations in another week.

   Parent: OK - I'll stop by on my way home on Friday.

ACTIVITY 21: Risk Taking and Problem Solving I

This activity is designed to contrast the efficiency of the techniques to be taught in this section with the usual group problem solving procedures.

Instructions

This activity requires that you work in small groups of seven individuals. Two of the learners in each group will observe. Of the remaining five, choose one learner to select a problem related to parent participation or to communication with parents on which the group can work to find a solution. The group should take any problem it chooses, organize in any fashion the group members agree to and use any method of problem solving group members wish. This problem solving session will be limited to between thirty minutes to an hour depending upon the time available. You will need a recorder to record important ideas for reporting to the total group.

Instructions for Observers

Observers should watch for answers to a few of the following questions:

1. Do the members use reflective listening or paraphrase?
   If so, when do they do so?

With what results on the process? (Does the process become more focused? Distracted from central concerns, repeat an earlier idea, etc.?)

2. Are any suggestions responded to by objections; i.e., analysis of what is wrong with the idea, why it won't work, what didn't work elsewhere?

3. Whose ideas are sidetracked by others' or by another's unrelated idea?

What is the response of the person who is sidetracked? What does the individual who is sidetracked say about other ideas? Is the sidetracked issue raised again later?

4. What happens when the group leader--if there is a recognized leader--responds favorably to a suggestion?

What happens, what do others do, when the leader responds unfavorably to an idea?

5. How evenly is participation distributed among members?

6. What happens when a "far-out" idea is suggested?

7. Are members encouraged to use their imagination, identify with the problem in different ways, fantasize to find new solutions?

8. How are ideas related to "real world" problems of implementation?

Discuss your answers of what you observed with members in your small group.

Use the rest of this page to write down any ideas you wish to remember that surface in your discussion.

Discussion of Problem Solving

Trainer Instructions

Reassemble the learners. At this point ask for the reports from the observers and conduct discussions with each set of observers and their group separately. Ask learners to give itemized responses.

The objective of this discussion is to increase awareness of the process which learners are using to solve problems. When the learners complete this discussion they should be able to identify the processes they used which facilitated the finding of a solution and those which hindered this outcome. They should also be able to state at least one way in which they did not facilitate a solution; i.e., a process which they might have used but didn't, and might also indicate at least one hindering process they did not use that they might have used.

Your task as a trainer is to be sensitive to observer reports and learner responses which indicate problem solving processes in each of these categories and to recognize, acclaim, reinforce, praise these accomplishments. Under no circumstances should the discussion generate into a dumping session; e.g., "If it weren't for her..." or "We could have but..." or "I really blew it this time (chuckle)." If the observer notes use of techniques taught in the workshop, you are to focus on the innovation of the practice, and the skill and alertness (in the sense of rapid application of a new technique to a new situation) of the practitioner--regardless of the observer or the learner's assessment of the outcome of

the application. The focus throughout the discussion should be on the process, the insights learners reach about the process and the linkage to subsequent sessions.

Once the precedent is established that no one will be attacked for an idea--then people in the group will be more open in their presentations. When there is an occasional lapse and cold water is dashed upon a new approach, the originator could be encourage to ask, "Would you be willing to say what you liked about my suggestion and what your concerns are about it?" This practice will likely increase participation and originality. To get the maximum mileage out of a group, it is even more exciting to deliberately and consciously encourage fantasy.

The final stage, when all of these insights and ideas have been gathered, might be to take each insight and ask how it applies to A's problem. This might develop suggestions that Parents as "Society" be invited to present their ideas on the school rather than listening to a lecture, etc.

Throughout this process, A's task would be to take what could be utilized for the goal of more effective involvement and to share concerns and ask for suggestions on how to solve these goals.

Through this process the leader and other members should be alert to whether or not A is (1) interested in solving the problem, (2) is committed to a solution and (3) does not have a hidden agenda or an implicit means of sabotaging the process by demonstrating that his problem "really" cannot be solved. The best way to avoid these wastes of time is to have

a clear idea of the problem at the beginning. It is also very useful to have the leader focus primarily on how group members are interacting while the participants and the person with the problem focus on what is a likely solution.

ACTIVITY 22: Risk Taking and Problem Solving II

At this point assemble the problem solving group used in the previous exercise, except that the observers will rotate their position with the other two learners. The new observers will now have the same questions which were used with the first observers.

Your group should select another person to present a problem upon which it will work for a solution. Utilize the suggestions which were made in this section plus the illustrations provided by your instructor.

Instructions for Observers

Observers may watch for answers to a few of the following questions for discussion later.

1. Do the members use reflective listening or paraphrase?
   If so, when do they do so?

With what results on the process? (Does the process become more focused? Distracted from central concerns, repeat an earlier idea, etc.?)

2. Are any suggestions responded to by objections; i.e., analysis of what is wrong with the idea, why it won't work, what didn't work elsewhere?

3. Whose ideas are sidetracked by others' or by another's unrelated idea?

What is the response of the person who is sidetracked? What does the individual who is sidetracked say about other ideas? Is the sidetracked issue raised again later?

4. What happens when the group leader--if there is a recognized leader--responds favorably to a suggestion?

What happens, what do others do, when the leader responds unfavorably to an idea?

5. How evenly is participation distributed among members?

6. What happens when a "far-out" idea is suggested?

7. Are members encouraged to use their imagination, identify with the problem in different ways, fantasize?

8. How are ideas related to your own problems of implementation?

ACTIVITY 23: Reactions to Group Problem Solving

1. As a group member, how did you feel about your contributions in this experience?

2. Were you aware of a difference in the level of participation for some members?

3. What was different for you during this experience by comparison with the first experience?

4. Did the role of leader (if there was one) change during this activity?

5. What are the advantages and disadvantages of rotating the leader role?

6. How would you rate the effectiveness of suggestions which emerged from this group experience as contrasted with the previous group work experience?

ACTIVITY 24: Follow-up

Utilize the itemized response in approaching problems at home. Next week report on three instances in which you used this approach and report on the outcomes.

SESSION VII:

SURVEY DESIGNS

Finding Out What Parents Want

We have covered many areas of communication--verbal, nonverbal, personal to distant, and so forth. Now, consider the specific goal of finding out what parents think and feel about their role in education and in your classroom in particular--what do they think they do, can do, and would like to do.

There are several ways to find this out:

1. You can give a party and ask everyone at once what roles they now fill in the classroom. This would be informative--parents would hear what others do in the classroom as well as express what they would like to do. It would be fun and might turn into a creative session in which they dream up some mutually exciting activities which would benefit them, their children, and you.

   Indicate what benefits you see in this approach.

   What are your concerns about this approach?

Some concerns might be that this approach would make it difficult for you to keep careful track of what each parent has to say. It might be difficult to communicate with each person in their preferred language and clarify any misunderstandings some might have--suppose some don't speak another's language? Some may want to please you and others and say more or less than they really think or feel because of the public nature of the setting. There are ways to deal with these and other concerns about this method. If you are attracted by this approach, you may want to discuss it with others in your training session.

2. You can also approach this goal by writing a questionnaire and sending it to the parents. The advantages of this approach include:
   a. a savings of your time, money and energy (all very important to a teacher);
   b. each person would get the same and all the questions you wanted answered;
   c. each would have more time to reply after some quiet, unpressured thinking;
   d. it would allow each parent to respond anonymously.

   Indicate what other advantages you see with this approach.

What concerns do you have about this approach?

Some frequent difficulties with the questionnaire approach are:

a. some parents may not know how or want to read and write;

b. making sure everyone gets it (if sent via the students they may lose the form, give incorrect information about it and other such problems);

c. getting generally low returns;

d. having to make the questionnaire entirely self-motivating;

e. uncertain identification of who responds--some may not sign it, hence you would not know what each parent wanted so that you could do a follow-up.

3. A third method of identifying what parents think and want with respect to educational roles is the <u>personal interview</u>.

Indicate what advantages or concerns you find to this approach.

Interviewing is desirable because:

a. the parents do not have to read or write (and you don't have to translate it into other languages);

b. you can change the questions, explain, or expand to fit the person;

c. you can check on the responses--clarifying what the responses really mean to the person;

d. it enables you to learn much more and discuss more complex and sensitive topics--you can explore with parents what they think they will get if given the opportunity to fill certain roles;

e. it gives you a chance to get to know the parents in a fairly nonthreatening setting with you learning from them and communicating (by just being there asking questions) that you are concerned about them and their views and that they can help you;

f. if done sensitively and sincerely, you can both leave the interview with a warm, friendly feeling about each other and yourselves.

Of course, with interviewing as with all approaches we can find difficulties to concern ourselves; and it actually helps us to find concerns, so that we can strengthen as much as possible whatever approach we choose.

Some concerns about interviewing are:

a. interviewing requires a trained interviewer (by now you have many interviewer skills and a very useful self-training aid is to tape yourself interviewing someone, then listen to the tape using the itemized response to identify what you liked about what you did and what you will try differently next time);

b. interviewing requires a great deal of time--contacting each parent, identifying mutually convenient meeting times and places;

c. it requires that you be able to speak the parent's preferred language or struggle with guessing whether what you think they said is really what they meant;

d. finding an appropriate place to meet may prove difficult--some parents may be reluctant or uncomfortable meeting in the school (some parents may feel they don't have the right clothes to visit school, for example) or they may be embarrassed about having "the teacher" visit their home.

Indicate your concerns about this approach.

4. A fourth option is to combine two or more techniques. Combining a party (#1) with a questionnaire (#2) would provide you with many more advantages and eliminate some disadvantages by identifying parent interest at a party, then obtaining specific items from the questionnaire.

Preparation for Parent Survey

Now that you have worked through the approach and concern of a couple of methods of "finding out what parents want," there are some other concerns that you must evaluate, mainly, what form of communication will you use, to get positive results from your parents.

As you plan your method of approach, check the list of "Ways to Make Messages More Effective" to determine if you are on the right track. It is important for you to gather some information before you can adequately plan for parent involvement, and to determine the difference between what you want to say and what you would like to happen as a result of your message.

Discuss these ways with a partner or in a small group.

Ways to Make Messages More Effective

1. Examine the purpose of each communication.

   Many messages fail because of inadequate pre-planning. The first step toward efficient, effective communication is to define the reason for the message

   Before communicating, ask yourself what it is you want to accomplish with the message. Have a definite purpose for each communication.

2. Clarify your ideas before communicating.

   The sharper the focus of your message, the greater the chance of success.

   When you have identified your most important goal, adapt the language, tone, and approach to serve that specific objective.

3. Choose the most appropriate mode for sending the message.

   The way you convey the message is of the utmost importance.

   Try using more than one medium to communicate negative messages.

4. Consider the total message to be communicated and its context.

   Messages should be as brief and clear as possible.

   Many factors influence the over-all impact of a message. Meaning and intent are conveyed by more than words alone. The physical setting, the timing, circumstances under which the message is sent, the social climate, and custom and past practices (the degree to which communication fits or doesn't fit the expectations of your audience) all set the tone of communication.

5. In planning messages consult others where appropriate.

   It is often necessary to seek the participation of others when developing the facts upon which effective messages are based. Such consultation often helps to make the message sharper and clearer.

6. Know the background and knowledge of the receiver.

   Communicate in the language system most familiar to the receiver. This may require translation.

   Give particular attention to the vocabulary and the reference terms used in the message. Messages must contain words, signs, and/or symbols that refer to experiences common to both the sender and the receiver.

   Message senders should be aware of the cultural expectations of the receiver.

   Messages must convey something of value to the receiver. Do not force your values or life style on the receiver.

   A message that tries to look at events from the receiver's point of view will be well received.

7. Understand the message overtones as well as the basic content.

   Tone of voice and expression have a tremendous impact on message receivers. Although frequently overlooked, these subtleties often affect the receiver's reaction to a message more than the basic content.

   Choice of language, particularly your awareness of the fine shades of meaning and emotion in the words you use, predetermines, in large part, the reactions of your listeners.

   Treat sensitive messages straightforwardly but tactfully.

   Be aware of the nonverbal cues of communication.

8. Messages must convey to the receiver that any response s/he gives will be welcomed and valued.

   Make certain that every important message sent has a return, so that complete understanding and appropriate action result.

   Ask questions and encourage the receiver to express his reactions.

   Present the receiver with a choice of alternative methods for solving the problem.

9. Follow up your communication.

   Always follow up your communication with personal contact.

10. Be sure your actions support your communications.

    The most persuasive kind of communication is not what you say but what you do. When a person's actions or attitudes contradict his messages, people tend to discount what he has said.

11. Try not only to be understood, but also to understand. Be a good listener. Listening is the most neglected skill in communication.

    Listening requires concentration not only on the explicit meanings of communication, but also on the implicit, unspoken words and undertones that may be far more significant.

ACTIVITY 25: Developing a Survey

This is intended to be a small group activity. Forms for each approach have been provided for your use on pages 140-145. However, if they do not meet your particular needs you may want to design your own.

1. Generate other methods or discuss combinations of methods for identifying the roles parents may fill and would like to fill in your classroom.

2. Choose one approach. Identify the advantages and concerns you have for that approach. Then find a way to deal with each concern to your satisfaction.

Approach:

Advantages:

Concerns:

1.

2.

3.

4.

Ways to deal with each concern:

1.

2.

3.

4.

3. Consider how doing a survey will help you reach your goals.

Sample Planning Letter

Specific Parent Activity

Date: _____

Dear _____:

I would like to have your help in planning a parent activity, a party, group meeting, etc., so I can talk with you and other parents of children in my class in an informal way, and discuss classroom activities you would like to take part in that would be beneficial for your child.

If you are interested in having such an activity, complete the form below, and return it to me as soon as possible. You will be notified of the results in one week.

Thank you for your cooperation.

Sincerely,

I am interested in having a _____
Type of activity

Name _____ Telephone _____

Questionnaire Form

Sample Parent Questionnaire

Date _____

Name _____ Telephone # _____

Dear Parents;

I am taking a survey of parents of children in my classroom. I am interested in finding out what activities have been available for participation in the classroom, and what activities are desired but have not been available.

In the second column (marked Current Activity), place a check mark for each activity or role you now take part in with your children. In the third column (marked Desired Activity), place a check mark for each activity in which you would like to take part.

There is space at the bottom of the page for any comments, reactions or questions you may have about this survey.

Thank you for your cooperation.

Sincerely,

ACTIVITY SURVEY

Possible Activities or roles for parents	Current Activity	Desired Activity
Room mother		
Repair books		
Transcribe tape recordings		
Supervise pasting of pictures for scrap-books and display		
Cut out art materials		
Prepare lesson plan with help of teacher to teach specific skills and concepts		
Work with children in small groups on cognitive skills		
Conduct story hour		
Help with planting of school garden		
Address and stuff envelopes for mailing		
Help bi-lingual children		
Help with transporta-tion on excursions		
Share aspects of different cultures with the children, e.g., music, dance, etc.		
Help plan parent-group meetings		
Help plan special parent activities		
Share construction skills		
Other		

Your comments:

Teacher Response Form

Dear _____:

Thank you again for your help in answering this form. I plan to tabulate the responses received from all the parents and let you all know the results as soon as possible.

After you receive a report on the survey results, I would like your suggestions on how we can work toward integrating the new roles or activities into the classroom; hopefully, we can all get together and share ideas on how best to use the survey findings and how your child would benefit.

In case you have anything you want to say or ask me before I contact you, please call or visit me at (write in school or other contact number) ....

Sincerely,

Questionnaire Form

Another Sample Questionnaire

Date _____

Name _____ Telephone # _____

We are taking a survey of parents of children in my classroom to find out what activities or roles they have taken part in at school and in the classroom, and what activities they would like to take part in now.

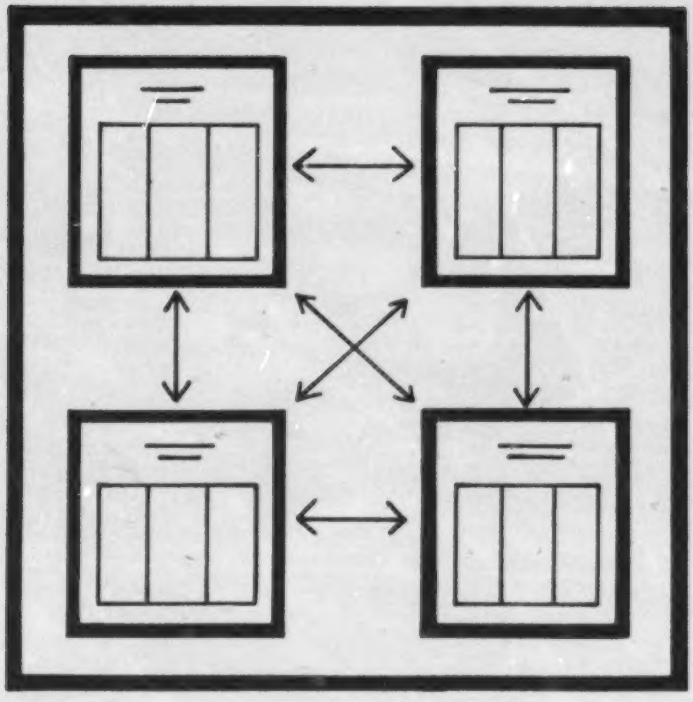
1. What are some activities you have performed in the classroom, or at school?

2. What are some activities you would like to take part in?

3. Which of these activities do you feel your child would benefit most from, through your participation?

4. Do you have any other concerns or questions about parent involvement in the classroom?

SESSION VIII:



PARENT SURVEY: IMPLEMENTATION AND FEEDBACK

Objective:

To obtain information from parents about the ways in which they would like to become involved in the classroom.

In the last session you became acquainted with different methods of conducting surveys to obtain information from parents. In this session, several of you will actually conduct a survey, and then share and discuss the results with the rest of the group.

Learners can decide who will do a group or individual survey. Using the parent information you have already gathered, generate a plan for using the data from the group survey. The initial planning should also be conducted in the group.

ACTIVITY 26: Group Planning of the Surveys to be Conducted

Have a recorder write the answers to these questions on a blackboard or newsprint. Responses to all the questions should be recorded for each of the learners who will be conducting the survey.

1. What purpose could a "parent survey" have for:

   A. Helping you with your communication goals?

   B. Communicating more effectively with parents?

   C. Developing ways to expand the role of parents in your classroom?

2. What information would you like from such a parent survey?

3. What method do you want to use to conduct this survey?

4. Select the most frequently chosen approach and do a short role-playing situation followed by discussion.

5. Learners who have chosen to do a survey should determine which method they will use, and ask for whatever additional help they need.

You are now ready to find out what parents think and feel about their roles in your classroom. Enjoy yourself.

ACTIVITY 27: Filling Out Survey Forms

Directions for Using Survey Forms (Tally Sheet)

Survey Form #1

After you have tallied the results of your Parent Survey, fill in columns one and two (Present Roles of Parents and Parent Wants/Needs).

Then, if you are a teacher, fill in column three (Teacher Wants/Needs), listing needs you would like parents to fulfill and ones from which you and the children in your classroom will benefit from most.

Survey Form #2

Next, take a look at Survey Form #2. Try to come to some agreement as to what "needs and wants" are common to both parents and teachers, then transform these into "new roles" for parents by using the problem solving process. If there are any special training needs/wants, put them in column three.

You now have some basis for planning.

SURVEY FORM #1

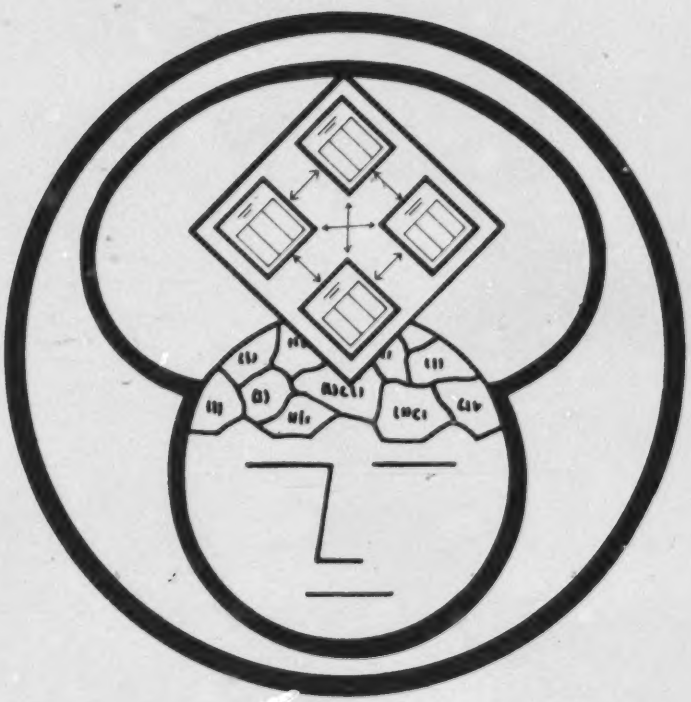
Tally Sheet

Present Roles of Parents	Parent Wants/Needs	Teacher Wants, Needs

SURVEY FORM #2

Needs Common to Teachers and Parents	New Roles Available to Parents	Special Training Needs/Wants

SESSION IX:



PARENT SURVEY RESULTS AND IMPLEMENTATION OF ALTERNATIVE EDUCATIONAL ROLES

Objectives:

To review the results of your survey, to analyze the information gained, and to make modifications of the survey method and questions.

Session IX will also provide you with opportunities to:

- Discuss the findings and decide how you will provide feedback to parents.
- Decide how you can use the information obtained to develop procedures for implementing alternative roles for parents.

ACTIVITY 28: Discussion of Survey Results

With your group or with a partner, discuss the following

A. What new information did you obtain from the parent survey

1. That you expected?

2. That was new and unexpected?

3. Write a plan for how you will use this information.

B. How do you evaluate the method used?

C. What changes would you make?

D. Feedback to parents.

1. What information will you communicate to parents regarding the survey results?

2. Choose how you will do it (You might want to follow the same procedures used in generating and determining what approach to use for doing the survey: identify different methods and give itemized responses to each).

3. What other ways of providing feedback can you use?

For example, suppose you used the sample questionnaire form presented during the last session. In that form you indicated that all parents would receive a report but you did not say how. You might choose to send a written report home, then invite them to a casual pot luck dinner or another planned activity some evening during which you briefly summarize the results, clarify any ambiguities and answer any questions about the questionnaire. Let parents discuss and decide what they would like to do about the results.

Ideally such a meeting would enable you to communicate your desires and concerns for the different activities. It would provide both you and the parents with the opportunity to work together in defining your mutual goals and to inform the parents about what kind and how much parent involvement you would like. These procedures might ideally include:

1. Ways in which you would structure classroom activities to accommodate parent activities which need no further training of the volunteer or you.

2. Ways in which parents might train each other or obtain outside training to be able to engage in the activities they desired, such as teaching children the ethnic history parents learned from older members of their community.

3. Ways you might provide training to parents in an area they choose. For instance, some parents might want to hold discussion groups with you on how to facilitate their children's intellectual or social development at home. This could be done by having a group of parents present an activity to the students while you meet with another group of parents. Another way could involve team teaching with other teachers and parent volunteers who would be willing to take the responsibility of your students while you met with parents or vice versa--you would teach their students while your students' parents met with a fellow teacher concerning some topic within her/his expertise.

Of course you will want to plan strategies, steps, solutions which are most appropriate for your personal style and preferences and for those of the parents and your community--school situation.

Follow-up to Survey

You may want to postpone answering these questions until after some of the above procedures have been generated by parents. Or, you may wish to work with a partner in this session and identify what you will do.

How will you use the information obtained from the survey?

1. To give parents access to the new roles or activities they identified as desired?

2. What can parents do on their own?

3. What will you do on your own?

Implementation

As part of your activities throughout this unit and especially in the previous two sessions, you have made a commitment to accomplish some tasks and reach some desired objectives. Making a commitment helps to clarify desires, specify how to attain them, identify with your strengths and your weaknesses, and increase the likelihood that you will reach your objectives.

Increasing parent involvement and implementing the Alternative Activities plan will include the parents. Setting goals with all parents will enable all of you to reach a mutual understanding of each others wants and needs as well as provide the opportunity for a public commitment regarding the objectives you develop together.

Suppose again you choose to provide feedback on the survey results by a written report and follow-up summary at a parent meeting.

You then proceed through the following steps:

1. Provide feedback on survey results and encourage questions for clarification.

2. Itemize the results and ask the parents how they feel about them.
   a. Address expressed concerns of parents.
   b. Invite parents to generate suggestions and to develop a plan for integrating alternative activities into the classroom.

Suggestions for Plan

1. Suggest ways the teacher could function differently; e.g., orientation time for volunteer parents.

2. Suggest topics for parent training workshops using community resources; e.g., counseling with children and other family members, child development classes.

3. Ask for commitments from parents and other school personnel who are willing to work to make the plan.

4. You may choose to give feedback, and develop a plan with parents in a large group meeting, in small groups or in some other way. Determine beforehand what role each participant will have in the meeting. Then, select the setting for a feedback and planning meeting and proceed through the steps outlined on the previous page (Implementation).

ACTIVITY 29: Evaluation of a Parent — Teacher Meeting

At your meeting, ask an "observer" to give you feedback on the interaction that took place, so everyone present can evaluate the effectiveness of the meeting. The person who is to observe should be someone most of you feel comfortable with. Give the observer specific instructions for feedback, so that the information you share will be helpful in determining how effective you are in communicating with parents and school personnel and especially your own communications with parents. You may also want to focus on the following areas, or if you prefer narrow your focus to a specific technique/strategy for getting feedback from parents.

1. Paraphrase what went on in the meeting. On what do you base your communications?

2. Which parents participated in the meeting?

3. What elicited parental participation (roles, feelings, commitments)? Ask parents how they feel about their participation.

4. What problems or concerns were shared?

5. What role did the teachers and other school personnel seem to play? How did they feel about their participation?

6. What do you think were the benefits to parents?

7. What do you think were the benefits to teachers?

8. How could the meeting have been made even more successful?

Follow-up Activities: These activities will serve as the basis for the final session of this unit.

A. Before the next session provide the parents of your students with feedback concerning the survey.

1. How did you go about making the survey?

2. What were the findings?

3. How can the findings be used for the benefit of students?

4. How could you follow-up this activity to help you fulfill your unit goals of communicating and working with parents?

B. Develop a plan for implementing alternative activities. You may choose to work on this by yourself, with other unit learners, or with parents of your students.

SESSION X:

CONCLUSION

Congratulations! Those of you who reach this session will have done a great deal of work and accomplished much. By now, those of you actively involved in this unit have made the teaching your own function as well as the learning. You may have thought, struggled, and ultimately produced plans and procedures uniquely your own. Your work may look very different from the examples given as guides, or they may resemble the examples closely. You may have fulfilled your unit goals by now or you may only have started. The most critical issue concerns the knowledge and skills covered in this unit and whether you are willing to use them to achieve what you wanted from this unit.

Program Development With Parents

In the follow-up activities for Session IX you began the active involvement of parents in the modification of their previous roles in the education of their own children. This final session will provide you with the opportunity to:

1. Share with each other the results of your efforts.

2. Obtain whatever feedback and problem-solving help you may need.

3. Support each other and acknowledge your own accomplishments as well as those of your peers.

4. Take credit for your accomplishments by sharing with your peers the progress you are making in your Alternative Activities.

ACTIVITY 30: Review of Session IX Activities

Now it is time to review the activities from Session IX, so you can see what was successful and so you can begin to plan how you will use the skills you have gained to communicate more effectively with your parents. You can do so by responding to the following questions and sharing the information with the total group.

A. Survey Feedback

1. What methods did you use to provide feedback to parents?

2. What methods were most effective and why?

3. What problems or concerns do you still need to resolve?

4. What follow-up activities will be helpful?

Note: Record the responses on newsprint, so that the group will have a list of methods to use for alternatives.

B. Development of Your Plan

1. How did you develop your plan?

2. Briefly describe what your plan was.

3. What part of your plan can you change to make it more successful?

Share the development of your plan with your group.

Now that you have reviewed the follow-up activities, decide what kind of teacher-parent relationship you want and work for it. Take some time to observe the activity in your classroom; then answer the following questions.

1. What is happening in your classroom?

2. How do you feel?

3. What are you communicating?

4. Is that what you want?

5. What are parents communicating about what they feel and think?

6. Is that what they want? If you are unsure, will you check it out with them?

7. What alternatives do you want to consider?

Perhaps you can get together with other learners of this unit and role play the new classroom interaction.

ACTIVITY 31: Summary

Summarize your experience. Think back over the training process you experienced with this unit.

If you have acquired the skills in this learning unit, then we expect that you will be able to accomplish much more than communicating sensitively and accurately with all parents and involving them in more active roles in the education of their children.

It is important for you to realize that you can apply these procedures and skills to many other interpersonal situations and goals. We hope you will, and do so with great satisfaction for you and those who are lucky to be around you.

1. What are the most significant things you have learned from this experience, and how will you use them?

2. What more do you want?

3. What will you do to get it?

4. How will you celebrate your accomplishments?

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A product of the

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1855 FOLSOM STREET, SAN FRANCISCO, CA 94103

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